

# A. W. Schlegel and the Nineteenth-Century *Damnatio* of Euripides

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IN HIS 1802–04 Berlin lectures on aesthetics, August Wilhelm Schlegel claimed that his younger brother Friedrich (in his essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry* [1795]), had been the first in the modern age to discern the “immeasurable gulf” separating Euripides from Aeschylus and Sophocles, thereby reviving an attitude the Greeks themselves had assumed towards the poet. The elder Schlegel noted that certain contemporaries of Euripides felt the “deep decline” both in his tragic art and in the music of the time: Aristophanes, with his unrelenting satire, had been assigned by God as Euripides’ “eternal scourge”;<sup>1</sup> Plato, in reproaching the poets for fostering the passionate state of mind through excessive emotionalism, actually pointed to Euripides (*SK* I 40). Schlegel believed that his younger brother’s observation of the profound difference between Euripides and the two other Greek tragedians was an important intuition that required detailed critical and comparative analysis for sufficient development (*SK* II 359). By appropriating this task as his own, August Wilhelm Schlegel inaugurated a phenomenon that we may describe as the nineteenth-century *damnatio* of Euripides.

The condemnation of Euripides by these early German romantics was no extravagant and isolated moment in their critical activity: it constituted a central event in the progressive formation of a new literary theory. Their pronouncements must be seen in the context of a larger movement, towards the end of the eighteenth century, that transformed the critical scene in Europe: the fall of the classicist doctrine and the rise of the new literary theory of romanticism.

## I. The Aesthetic Principles Guiding the Romantic Rediscovery of Greek Tragedy

Without considering all the ramifications of this important phase in criticism, we will focus here on the rôle that Greece, and especially

<sup>1</sup> A. W. Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, ed. Jakob Minor, I–III (Heilbronn 1884 [hereafter *SK*]) II 358f.

Greek tragedy, played in it. The modest origins of this development may be traced to January 1794, when Friedrich Schlegel, then twenty-one years old, settled in Dresden to begin intensive study of Greek literature, including rhetoric and history, pursued in the context of Greek religious and political life.<sup>2</sup> Through these studies Schlegel sought to become the “Winckelmann of Greek poetry”<sup>3</sup>—to present Greek literature as an evolutionary system of genres, a *Lehrgebäude* similar to Winckelmann’s presentation of the history of ancient art (1764) as a progressive fulfillment of a cycle of artistic styles.<sup>4</sup> Schlegel felt that he was dealing with the period of Western literature most significant for the study of poetry as such: as he saw it, he was turning to that people in whom poetry was “at home” and who for this reason provided the best possible basis for a concrete understanding of how this art originated, differentiated itself, and finally decayed. He wrote to his brother on 4 April 1794, “The history of Greek poetry is a comprehensive natural history of the beautiful and of art; therefore my work is one of—aesthetics.”<sup>5</sup>

This orientation of the new romantic poetics toward the Greeks brought about a considerable shift in the position of classicism in European thinking. While the writers of the Renaissance and the French classical school had found their models of perfection in the Augustan age (*i.e.*, the Roman form of classicism), the German romantics attempted to achieve the closest possible contact with the Greeks. They developed a model of intimacy with antiquity still valid for Nietzsche, in which not mere familiarity with classical Greece, but an actual incorporation of this world was essential to a genuine rebirth in the modern age. Classicism and modernism (or rather, romanticism) were thus intricately interwoven, and Greek literature became central to romantic literary theory.<sup>6</sup>

From 1794 to 1797 Friedrich Schlegel published a number of articles that provide insight into his conception of Greek literature and the evolution of its genres. In 1798 the first volume of a projected larger work appeared, whose title, *History of the Poetry of the Greeks*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler with Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner, I– (Paderborn 1958– [hereafter *KA*]) I 205f. Most of the references in the present article are to this volume, containing F. Schlegel’s *Studien des klassischen Altertums*, a collective title for various essays and works on classical literature from 1794 to 1823.

<sup>3</sup> See Behler (*supra* n.2) I lxxix.

<sup>4</sup> See Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, ed. Wilhelm Senff (Weimar 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *KA* I lxxix; XXIII, no. 96.

<sup>6</sup> See *KA* I xci–xciii.

*and the Romans*,<sup>7</sup> indicates that Schlegel intended to include Roman poetry as a comparison to that of the Greeks. Although his works are seldom consulted in classical scholarship except as historical documents, they were esteemed at the time of their appearance by such scholars as F. A. Wolf and Christian Gottlob Heyne.<sup>8</sup> Later, Wilamowitz would see their chief merit in having instilled new life into the prevailing somewhat petrified view of the Greeks by presenting Greek literature in the image of a birth, growth, and withering of poetic genres.<sup>9</sup> Schlegel has also been credited for having emphasized for the first time the Orphic and Dionysian dimensions of Greek poetry that became central to the views of Burckhardt and Nietzsche.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately Schlegel's presentation of Greek literature breaks off shortly after his discussion of the "epic age," giving only brief intimations of the ensuing "lyric age," and with only occasional references to the concluding "dramatic age" (I 555). As so often in later years, Schlegel dropped a subject once he felt he had mastered it, leaving it to posterity to work out the conclusions he might have reached. On 21 June 1796, Schlegel had written to Karl August Böttiger, co-editor of the *Attisches Museum*, that among his papers he had a nearly-completed history of Attic tragedy: "a bundle of about a hand's breadth." He had taken up his Greek studies once again some four years earlier with Attic tragedy, he explained, and this topic had since remained the focus of his investigations. He now wanted to divide these papers, carefully edited according to the "tragic triumvirate," into three articles to be published in the *Museum*. "This I can dare to say," he added, "few have investigated Attic tragedy as zealously as I, and my attempt certainly does not contain mere repetitions of the already known." Schlegel's articles did not appear, however, and the manuscripts have been lost; but among unpublished material that has survived there are numerous indications of how he would have continued his work (*KA* XI 189–263). The direction of his thought is also clear from the earlier articles on Greek literature (*KA* I 3–394), as well as in his later comprehensive histories on ancient and modern literature (*KA* VI, XI). On the basis of the material available to us it is possible to reconstruct his argument.

<sup>7</sup> *KA* I 395–568.

<sup>8</sup> *KA* lxxiv–lxxv.

<sup>9</sup> Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die griechische und lateinische Literatur und Sprache*<sup>7</sup>, ed. Paul Hinneberg (Leipzig/Berlin 1912) 316.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Friedrich Gundolf, *Romantiker* (Berlin 1930) 30; E. Behler, "Die Auffassung des Dionysischen durch die Brüder Schlegel und Friedrich Nietzsche," *Nietzsche-Studien* 12 (1983) 335–54.

The main purpose of Schlegel's concern with the literature of the Greeks was to learn what poetry is. His most influential discovery was the concept of "poetic unity" (a concept that became, indeed, the cornerstone of the new romantic theory, under the guise of "organic unity.") The term "poetic" referred not to a passive imitation of nature but to an active transformation of reality, originating in the creative mind and resulting in a special type of unity shaped by the power of the imagination. Schlegel believed that the concept of unity had been grossly distorted during the course of critical history and reduced by the authors of *artes poeticae* to mere conventions, such as the unities of time, space, and action—or, even worse, to ephemeral notions of *bienséance*, *vraisemblance*, decorum, and to fixed manners of speaking among members of various classes in a particular society.

For Schlegel, poetic unity ought to derive from the inner nature of a literary work and reveal an inherent necessity—just as in Aristotle's conception of genre, tragedy, for example, went through many changes until it reached the fulfillment of its own nature (Arist. *Poet.* 1449a15f). Although Schlegel derived the poetic unity of a work of literature from its "structure and arrangement" (adopting the Greek term *μορφή ἐπέων*, I 451), he usually defined the concept of unity with the terms "harmony" or "perfection." He saw the harmony of the poetic work as the result of an inner conformity and identity with itself. Illustrations of this harmony he found in the works of the archaic and classical periods: "The material has been absolutely shaped as in Homer, or the blueprint has been perfectly executed as in Sophocles" (I 130). Such a work "does not excite any expectation that it does not satisfy; invention and execution, productive imagination and ordering judgment, matter and form are all in equal balance." These works do not appear to be constructed, but seem to have existed eternally and spontaneously, "as the goddess of love emerged with ease and at once perfect from the sea" (I 298). The most important task of poetry was to "tie the elements together into one and to perfect this bond as an absolutely completed whole" (I 294f). Schlegel defined the unity of such a poetic whole as a "beautiful organization in which even the smallest part is necessarily determined by the laws and purpose of the whole, and yet is autonomous and free" (I 305). He was convinced that, of all the arts, poetry offered the best means of fulfilling the task of creating this kind of unity, basing his conviction on the particular medium of poetry, *i.e.*, language itself.

Although he was aware that Greek criticism emerged when the age of the great poets was long past (I 350), Schlegel derived much of his

conception of poetic unity from ancient theoreticians and critics of poetry: these had enjoyed a thorough familiarity with a wealth of literature undiminished by subsequent losses (I 494), he maintained, and were undoubtedly in a position to appreciate the beauty of Homeric poetry, for example, far more accurately than a sentimental reader of the late eighteenth century (I 500). Among the older critics of the Alexandrian school, Schlegel felt a kinship with Zenodotus of Ephesus and Aristarchus of Samothrace; he was inspired by their example of forming aesthetic judgments on the basis of what was considered to be genuinely classical. He was also struck by Polemon's evaluation of Homer as an "epic Sophocles" (I 129), and reports an earlier dictum of Socrates on the truly classical artists: "In epic poetry I most admire Homer; and in the dithyramb Melanippides; in tragedy Sophocles; in sculpture Polykleitus; and in painting Zeuxis" (I 464). While this evaluation must have assured Schlegel of the classical status of Sophocles, it cannot have increased his appreciation of Euripides, although he was aware that Euripides was highly regarded by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (I 197). In his own judgments Schlegel considered Socrates to be "a philosophical Sophocles" (I 634) and Pindar "a Doric Sophocles" (I 561); but he was unsure whether Hesiod, whom he did not esteem highly, would deserve the "name of the epic Euripides" (I 537).

The most important Greek critics and rhetoricians during the Roman period were, for Schlegel, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and 'Longinus'. As author of a treatise on artistic composition and poetic word-order (*Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων*), Dionysius appealed directly to Schlegel's principle of poetic unity, and Schlegel frequently consulted him during the formative years of his poetic theory.<sup>11</sup> But his own 'structuralist' or 'holistic' poetics was based not so much on arrangements of words or linguistic principles as on the 'organic' model of a relationship between the parts and the whole in an aesthetic unity. A more relevant parallel to Schlegel's notion of unity is to be found in 'Longinus'' description of how, in a Sapphic ode (31 L.-P.), an entire spectrum of bodily sensations and passionate emotion (*παθῶν δὲ σύνοδος*) is bound together in a single image of love (*Subl.* 10.2f).

It is not surprising that Schlegel saw Greek tragedy as the most perfect and harmonious expression within this world of art. From the point of view of structure and poetic unity, no other genre could accomplish that kind of tight cohesiveness which nevertheless in-

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., his 1796 translation, with introduction and postscript, *Kunsturteil des Dionysios über den Isokrates* (KA I 169–99).

cludes the most diverse variety of constituent parts: "Only the tragic poet, whose particular goal is to combine the greatest scope and the strongest vigor with the highest unity, can give his work a perfect organization, the beautiful structure of which is disturbed neither by the slightest want nor by the smallest superfluity" (I 296). The epic poem does not have this cohesion, in which all threads of the work originate in one initial point and lead to one final destination (I 472). Schlegel compared its unity and harmony to that of an octopus (I 131), integrating a vast abundance of seemingly accidental parts as either "results of previous occurrences or the nucleus of future events" (I 474) through an unending "stream" of narration whose limits remain unrestricted (I 124). Lyric poetry no longer attempts to depict the great events of the past: by insisting on the momentary, the passionate, and the internal, it achieves a poetic coherence and identity far superior to that of the epic poem (I 561). Yet in concentrating on the poet's inner world at the expense of action and events in the outer world, the realm of lyric remains restricted in comparison with tragedy; its unity is characterized by a less entangled complexity.

The absolute priority of tragedy over the other genres was, for Schlegel, evident from a developmental point of view—from the historical unfolding of genres during the main phases, or 'ages', of Greek literature. By uniting epic myth and legend with the reflective introspection of lyric, and by establishing a perfect balance between action and chorus, tragedy closed the cycle of Greek literature with a complete synthesis of epic (action) and lyric (chorus) poetry. While epic reflects the heroic age and presents humanized gods interacting with heroes (I 333), and the lyric age coincides with the beginnings of political self-determination in Greece (I 128, 212), dramatic poetry is associated with the full achievement of democracy in Athens (XI 245). In the religious sphere the ideal of the "absolute" and the "image of an incomprehensible infinity" mark this step into a new world (XI 411). As a product of the concept of an absolute and unyielding fate, dramatic poetry has as its object the presentation of the "highest and most noble type of humanity" (I 463) and permits the poet a greater degree of freedom than had hitherto existed. While even the most artistic epic and lyric poems of the older Greeks still had their footing in reality or myth, dramatic poetry appears as "completely torn apart from the real world" (I 502). This is noticeable not so much in the alterations of the given myth that now became more "remarkable and abrupt," as in the most fundamental task of dramatic presentation, *i.e.*, "to make the most distant appear as immediately

present. . . . Because of the inner unity of its original creations from mere and pure appearance, the dramatic genre deserves preferably and in the fullest sense the name of poetic art, whose essence consisted for the ancients in the completion of lasting works" (I 502). This is another and perhaps the most decisive reason why, for Schlegel, poetic unity manifests itself only in Greek drama as an "absolutely completed and absolutely accomplished poetic unity in itself" (I 472).

Greek tragedy constituted for Schlegel (anticipating Nietzsche) a unique and unrepeatable event in literary history. To define this highest achievement of classical literature, Schlegel compared with ancient tragedy what he considered to be the culmination of modern tragedy, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Emphasizing the poetic character and harmonious structure of classical tragedy, and the foreign elements of reason and the "will for the unconditional" in the modern, he described the former as "aesthetic" or "beautiful" tragedy and the latter as "philosophical" tragedy (I 246). Schlegel soon realized the danger of coining new aesthetic terms and renamed the classical tragedy—with its persistent purity of the entire tragic action (I 246)—"objective tragedy," and the Shakespearean "interesting tragedy," because of its focus on the "interesting" and "characteristic" features of the protagonist (I 215). These minor terminological nuances do not really alter Schlegel's basic vision of these two types of tragedy: for although both appear as an absolutely organized or structured whole, the nodal point of classical tragedy is the harmony of man and fate, which modern tragedy presents as the "most intense disharmony" of man's being in the world (I 246)—what Nietzsche later called the "Hamlet-doctrine,"<sup>12</sup> *i.e.*, the message of an irreconcilable conflict between thought and action. Hamlet's mind is torn apart, in Schlegel's interpretation, "as on the rack, in two different directions" (I 247). This "immeasurable disproportion" between the protagonists' capabilities for thought and for action offered perhaps the clearest possible statement of the "insoluble disharmony which is the true subject of the philosophical tragedy." The total effect of this tragedy was for Schlegel a "maximum of despair. All impressions that in themselves appeared great and important vanish as trivial before what here appears to be the last and only result of all being and thought: the eternal, colossal dissonance endlessly separating man and fate" (I 248).

When Schlegel declared "harmony" to be the central feature of classical tragedy, he of course exposed himself to criticism and even

<sup>12</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* 7, "Hamletlehre."

ridicule. Schiller seized the opportunity when in 1796 he published among his *Xenien* a satirical epigram with the title "The Highest Harmony," almost certainly directed against Schlegel:

Oedipus tears out his eyes, Jocasta hangs herself,  
both innocent; the play has ended harmoniously.<sup>13</sup>

Schlegel actually understood "harmony" as the transformation of the ruinous and terrifying appearance of fate into a reconciliation, establishing a balance between terror and compassion. "Mere terror would paralyze us to complete unconsciousness" (I 298), whereas in Greek tragedy the "relentless and necessary struggle between fate and humanity is resolved in harmony through a particular kind of moral beauty" (I 301). Schlegel thought of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, which concludes the abyss of suffering and crime in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroe* with a merciful oracle, but more directly of Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*, in which the suffering old man's death is presented as a transition to the reconciled gods (VI 282f). Here again Schlegel appears to be in complete agreement with Nietzsche, who sensed in the final stage of Oedipus' tragedy a "supernatural serenity," descending from the divine sphere to resolve the "inextricably entangled litigious knot of the Oedipus fable," and instilling in us the "deepest human joy."<sup>14</sup> (We are touching here upon the attempt to answer in a non-Aristotelian manner the question of pleasure in tragic subjects, a problem to which we shall return.)

Schlegel nevertheless believed that this perfection of Greek tragedy lasted "but one moment" (I 29). More precisely, he saw three main stages in the development of the genre: "that of greatness, that of accomplished beauty, and that of unrestrained vigor and richness" (I 56). The first, represented by Aeschylus, had the character of "harsh greatness" but lacked "graciousness" and "ease." During its second stage, tragedy achieved the "highest beauty" with Sophocles, and this beauty forms the "maximum of Greek poetry." Then during the third stage, with Euripides, tragedy lost its "harmony" and degenerated into a "vigorous yet anarchical debauchery." Philosophy and rhetoric exerted a pernicious influence upon tragedy. Schlegel appreciated the "anarchical beauty" of Euripides as "exciting, fascinating, and brilliant," but saw as this poet's highest goal not the creation of beauty but the excitement of the passions (I 14f). After him, the Athenians, with the clearest and most painful consciousness of their

<sup>13</sup> Hans Heinrich Borchardt, *Schiller und die Romantiker. Briefe und Dokumente* (Stuttgart 1948) 427.

<sup>14</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* 9.

decay, deteriorated “not only in this or that genre, but in their entire existence, in all arts, in constitution and laws, in private and public customs and actions, from beautiful perfection to luxury, whose still remaining power also soon became exhausted” (I 537).

## II. The Historical Background of the Romantic Re-evaluation of Euripides

Although not always directly related to the reception of Euripides, the evaluation of Greek tragedy during the classicist period was another important factor in its romantic rediscovery; a brief survey will help to place the *damnatio* of Euripides into a wider perspective. Despite Horace’s injunction to imitate the ancients (*Ars P.* 268f: “Do you, my friends, study the Greek masterpieces: thumb them day and night”), French neoclassicism, during the late seventeenth century, had come to depreciate Greek tragedy in comparison with the *tragédie classique* of France. When spokesmen for the qualities of modern literature, such as Charles Perrault, attempted to justify their predilection for the literature of the age of Louis XIV, it was quite understandable that they gave preference to the tragedies of Corneille and Racine over those of the Greeks. They tried to demonstrate that their age had not only progressed beyond Aristotle’s *Physics* but had also generated literary beauties unanticipated in his *Poetics*.

The ancients, Perrault argued, knew the seven planets and the great number of small stars as we do, but not the satellites of the planets or the great number of small stars discovered since.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, they knew “the passions of the soul, but not the infinity of small affections and small circumstances which accompany them.” As anatomy had discovered new facts about the human heart that had escaped the knowledge of the ancients, so moral knowledge had come to include inclinations, aversions, desires, and disgusts of which the ancients had no idea. Perrault believed it was possible to point out in the works of the authors of his time—in their moral treatises, their tragedies, their novels, and in their rhetorical writings—thousands of delicate sentiments entirely absent in the ancients (II 30f). Given this historical development, Perrault concluded, Aristotle and Horace after him had based their poetic rules on the usages and the conditions of their own time (III 282). As to Aristotle’s dictum that it was the goal of tragedy to purge the passions, this was mere *gali-*

<sup>15</sup> Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des anciens et des modernes* (Paris 1688–97 [quoted in the text by volume and page]) II 29f.

*matias* that nobody had ever understood (III 276). One of the most repellent features of Greek tragedy consisted for Perrault in its chorus, “which was always present and annoying, which recommenced the same lamentations with sentences ever more extended and with an ever greater insistence” (III 199).

These are some of the main arguments marshalled against the unquestioning acceptance of the model of Greek tragedy; they were repeated and amplified by other *modernes* with more or less vigor. Fontenelle had already maintained in his *Digression* of 1688 that the best works of Sophocles, Euripides, or Aristophanes would not stand up to the tragedies and comedies of the great age of Louis XIV; and he went so far as to impugn the authority of Aristotle.<sup>16</sup> The most outspoken adversary of Greek tragedy in this debate, however, was Saint-Evremond, who in his essay *Of Ancient and Modern Tragedy* (1672) attacked the essential features of ancient tragedy as well as the theory upon which it was supposed to rest. His main purpose was to show that if the best work of antiquity in this genre—*Oedipus Rex*, let us say—were translated into French with the same spirit and force of the original, we would realize “that nothing in the world would appear to us more cruel, more opposed to the true sentiments mankind ought to have” (182).<sup>17</sup>

With an even sharper tongue than Fontenelle, Saint-Evremond first directed his attack against the Aristotelian theory of tragedy by declaring that the *Poetics* was as outdated as the *Physics*, and that it by no means contained “the standing rules of all nations and all ages.” Just as Descartes and Gassendi had discovered truths that were unknown to Aristotle, so Corneille had created “beauties for the stage, of which Aristotle was ignorant” (171). Greek tragedy consisted mainly in the arousal of fear and pity, making the theater a “school of terror and pity” (177). To impress these sentiments all the more intensely in the spectators, there was always upon their stage “a chorus of virgins or of old men, who furnished them upon every event either with terrors or with tears” (178). Aristotle of course understood what these excesses might do to the Athenians, and attempted to balance them with his idea of purgation. Yet no one has ever understood this theory, and Aristotle himself could not have

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes; Digression sur les anciens et les modernes*, ed. Robert Shackleton (Oxford 1955) 174f.

<sup>17</sup> Citations are from Charles de Saint-Evremond, *Oeuvres en prose*, ed. René Ternois, IV (Paris 1969) 170–84. The translation is taken from Pierre Desmaizeaux, *The Works of M. de Saint-Evremond* (London 1728), available in *The Continental Model*, edd. Scott Elledge and Donald Schier (Ithaca 1970) 123–30.

fully comprehended it, according to Saint-Evremond: "For can anything be so ridiculous as to raise a perturbation in our souls for no other end than to endeavor afterwards to calm it?" (178).

Saint-Evremond's main argument, however, is that the spirit of the Christian religion and the civilizing effect it has had upon the modern age is "directly opposed to tragedy" (173)—at least to ancient Greek tragedy. In these plays, he argues, the gods occasioned the greatest and most abominable crimes, as when Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his beloved daughter. Yet the audience was supposed to consider "this barbarous sacrifice as a pious obedience" and "not find fault with those things which were really abominable" (183). Saint-Evremond pleads for a "new tragedy," the tragedy of "admiration," instead of that of "terror and pity" (184): this new tragedy would be content with "things purely natural," yet at the same time "extraordinary" (175); it would furthermore substitute love for those "black ideas which ancient tragedy caused in us through superstition and terror" (180). Saint-Evremond was convinced that once this task has been accomplished, "we shall not set up the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides as the only models for dramatic compositions of our time" (182). He concludes his essay on tragedy with a "daring thought," expressly emphasized as his own: "We ought, in tragedy, before all things whatever, to look after a greatness of soul well expressed, which excites in us a tender admiration. By this sort of admiration our minds are sensibly ravished, our courage elevated, and our souls deeply affected" (184).

We are safe in assuming that the new tragedy of admiration advocated by Saint-Evremond is the tragedy created by Corneille and mentioned at the beginning of his essay. It appears highly significant of the low esteem of classical Greek tragedy at the time that although Boileau, the most ardent and eloquent spokesman for the ancients during that quarrel, maintained an attitude of reverence towards the classics in general and saw great advantage in imitating them, he nevertheless supported the *modernes* on the superiority of Corneille's new tragedy of admiration. It also becomes clear from his presentation that this new concept of tragedy has its roots in the notion of the 'sublime' as it was expressed by 'Longinus'—or rather, as this concept was understood in classicist France.

In the preface to his 1674 translation of *De sublimitate*, Boileau had already referred to Corneille's *Horace* in attempting to illustrate what 'Longinus' understood by the term 'sublime': after a description of the moving way in which Horace's character is revealed, he adds, "These are things Longinus calls sublime, things he would have

admired in Corneille if he had lived in Corneille's time" (340).<sup>18</sup> In his letter of reconciliation with Perrault (1701), concluding the struggle between the *anciens* and *modernes*, Boileau readily admitted that Corneille invented "a new kind of tragedy unknown to Aristotle." In his finest plays, Corneille set himself above outmoded rules: he did not attempt to arouse pity and fear like the poets of ancient tragedy, "but rather wished to stir in the souls of the spectators, by sublimity of thought and beauty of sentiment, a certain wonder, with which many persons, and young people especially, tend to find themselves much more comfortable than they do with real tragic passions" (570). Yet in order to maintain the principle of imitating the ancients, he asked Perrault the rhetorical question, "Can you not agree that it is Sophocles and Euripides who made M. Racine?" (570). And even with regard to Corneille's new tragedy of admiration he asked, "Can you deny that it is from Livy, from Dio Cassius, from Plutarch, from Lucan, and Seneca that M. de Corneille took his finest touches?" (570).

Among French critics who formed the more immediate background to the work of the Schlegels was Voltaire, who declared in his *Dissertation on Ancient and Modern Tragedy*<sup>19</sup> that it would reveal a great lack of judgment if one did not realize "how much the French stage surpasses the Greek by virtue of the art of performance, by invention, and by countless particular beauties" (377). By substituting history for the Greek fable, and by introducing politics, ambition, jealousy, and the passions of love as dominant elements of the theater, French tragedy achieved a more truthful imitation of nature (370f). The Greeks would have been astonished had they seen such accomplishments of French tragedy as "the collision of passions, these combats of opposed sentiments, these animated discourses of rivals, these interesting disputes in which one says what one ought to say" (372).

Diderot's *Encyclopédie* of 1751–72 also strongly differentiates between the two systems of tragedy. Taking up an idea already developed in Fontenelle's *Réflexions sur la poétique* (1742),<sup>20</sup> the author of the article on tragedy classifies it according to two different sources of misfortune, one outside ourselves and the other internal (840).<sup>21</sup> This

<sup>18</sup> Cited from Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris 1966). The translations are taken from Boileau, *Selected Criticism*, tr. Ernest Dilworth (Indianapolis 1965).

<sup>19</sup> Published as the preface to his tragedy *Sémiramis* (1748). Citations are to *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, ed. Kehl, XXX (1785).

<sup>20</sup> Fontenelle, *Oeuvres. Nouvelle édition* III (Paris 1767) 127–208.

<sup>21</sup> Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, ed. Pellet, XXXIII (Geneva 1772) s.v. "Tragédie," where the article is attributed to Jean-François Marmontel.

distinction had motivated Fontenelle to assign to the lowest rank that kind of tragedy in which misfortune is the outcome of an irrational fate, *i.e.*, Greek tragedy. Similarly in the *Encyclopédie* ancient tragedy is described as based exclusively on extraneous causes: “destiny, the anger of the gods or their will, without any motivation—in a word, fate” (841). In the modern system, tragedy is no longer a picture of the calamities of man as a slave of fate, but of man as a slave of his passions; the nucleus of tragic action has been placed in man’s heart. This, at least, is the case in the modern tragedy created by Corneille (841): after the renaissance of letters, it was he who discovered a new source of tragic events sharply different from the fabulous history to which Greek tragedy was bound; and with this discovery, “modern Europe recognized the type of tragedy that was its own” (845). The advantages of this new development are considered remarkable in comparison to the Greek stage; they are summarized in the *Encyclopédie* as “more fruitful, more universal, more moral, more fitting to the form and size of the modern theater, and more susceptible to every possible charm of representation” (845).

Of special interest to our present discussion is the *Encyclopédie*’s view of the historical development of Greek tragedy. Aeschylus gave tragedy a “gigantic appearance, hard features, and an impetuous bearing”: it was tragedy in the stage of its birth, still destitute of that *politesse* that art and time add to new inventions. Sophocles, with a great resource of genius, a delicate taste, and a marvelous facility of expression, “confined the tragic muse to the rules of decency and truth.” Euripides was the first to associate himself with the philosophers, with Anaxagoras as his master. His plays are full of excellent maxims for conduct, and Socrates did not fail to assist him when he needed new ones. Euripides is “tender, touching, truly tragic, although less elevated and less vigorous than Sophocles” (828).

This developmental scheme presents elements already evident in Boileau and Saint-Evremond, and later apparent in Madame de Staël’s view of Greek tragedy. In her work *On Literature* (1800) she maintains that the tragedies of modern France are far superior to those of the ancient Greeks because the greater range of dramatic talent they require not only includes the art of poetry, but also a profound knowledge of the passions; and in this respect tragedy has participated in the progress of the human mind (70).<sup>22</sup> In none of the Greek

<sup>22</sup> Cited from Anne Louise de Staël-Holstein, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales*, ed. Paul van Tieghem (Geneva/Paris 1959).

tragedians does one find the “torturing and melancholic depiction” of pain achieved by modern authors (71). As to the sequence of the three Greek tragedians, Madame de Staël notices a certain progressive improvement and development among them: there is an even greater distance between Aeschylus, on the one hand, and Sophocles and Euripides, on the other, than can be explained by the natural progress of the human mind in so short a period of time (70f). For her, as for other exponents of French neoclassicism, Aeschylus represents a raw prototype of tragedy, and is separated by a deep gulf from the other two poets in whom Greek tragedy found full expression. This evaluation is virtually opposite to that of the Schlegel brothers, and it provides the background for August Wilhelm Schlegel’s claim that his brother was the first critic in the modern age to recognize the “immeasurable gulf” separating Euripides from Aeschylus and Sophocles (*SK* II 359).

But our long digression into the French classicist view of Greek tragedy has been intended not merely to illustrate this relatively minor point, but to clarify more generally the historical and critical motivations behind the evaluation of Euripides by the Schlegel brothers. We notice first of all the German critics’ desire to rescue from oblivion and disrespect a form of art that was an essential part of their own literary theory. The French *tragédie classique* could not provide them with that model. When, in the introduction to his essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Friedrich Schlegel based his contrast between “objective” and “interesting” tragedy on Sophocles and Shakespeare, he was fully aware that he was ignoring the most established and recognized tragedy of his own time; he added sarcastically, “If, out of an exaggerated tolerance for the stubbornness of linguistic usage, one would like to continue to call the genre of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire ‘tragedy’, one could distinguish it by adding the adjective ‘French’, as a reminder that this tragedy is only a national presumption” (*KA* I 215). In Schlegel’s *Dialogue on Poetry* of 1800, one of the interlocutors reads a paper on the development of European literature and is afterwards told, “You have hardly mentioned the French at all.” His answer is: “It happened without particular intention; I simply found no reason to do so” (*KA* II 303). August Wilhelm Schlegel’s attitude toward French classicist tragedy was even more critical, and occasionally marked by real animosity.

One decisive motivation for the prominence of Greek tragedy in the aesthetics of the Schlegels can be seen in their attempt to substitute a genuine form of drama for one that they considered distorted. Lessing and others had sufficiently proven for Friedrich Schle-

gel, “that the principles of French tragedy were absolutely false, its presuppositions and conditions completely arbitrary and wrong, the apparent attempt to restore the old tragedy an entire failure, and the whole out of line and void” (*KA* III 38). Yet the Schlegels approached tragedy not predominantly from the point of view of poetics, *artes poeticae*, and rules, but from that of philosophy—more specifically, of idealistic philosophy. They saw in Aristotle the beginning of a trend that had, over the centuries, resulted in a complete misunderstanding of tragedy. They attempted, as would be said later about Nietzsche, to restore to Greek tragedy the element of religion, which Aristotle had eliminated from it.<sup>23</sup> In Kantian terms, they saw tragedies as symbolic representations of the most central aspect of humanity: the struggle between man and fate, the conflict of freedom and necessity. Schiller had introduced this new view of tragedy, and interpreted as the message of tragedy the victory of the moral law in spite of the protagonist’s physical defeat.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, for Schelling and Hegel tragedies became paradigms of a dialectical process illustrating the restoration of order following catastrophe. Marx interpreted tragedy according to his own understanding of the dialectics of world history, and saw in it the emergence of deeds and events whose moment had not yet arrived, which had come “too early.”<sup>25</sup> It is obvious that Nietzsche’s Dionysian interpretation of the message of tragedy—that “beneath the whirl of phenomena” and the constant destruction of phenomena, “eternal life flows indestructibly”<sup>26</sup>—is inseparable from this sequence of philosophical interpretations of tragedy in nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>27</sup>

For the Schlegels, then, the depiction in tragedy of man’s conflict with fate represents (in yet another anticipation of Nietzsche) the superhuman qualities of humanity; the dominant aspect of this spectacle is an aesthetic one,<sup>28</sup> deriving its beauty from that harmony between man and fate, drama and mythology, action and chorus we noted earlier. But in emphasizing this harmony as the highest accomplishment of tragedy, Friedrich Schlegel came inevitably to reject that poet who appeared to him to have lost all these qualities.

<sup>23</sup> M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge 1981) 311.

<sup>24</sup> See his essays on tragedy and on the reason for our delight in tragic subjects in Friedrich Schiller, *Werke* (Weimar 1962) 133–247.

<sup>25</sup> S. S. Prawer, *Karl Marx and World-Literature* (Oxford 1976) 197–231.

<sup>26</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* 18.

<sup>27</sup> See Peter Szondi, *Versuch über das Tragische* (Frankfurt 1961).

<sup>28</sup> See E. Behler, “Die Theorie der Tragödie in der deutschen Frühromantik,” in *Romantik in Deutschland. Ein interdisziplinäres Symposium*, ed. Richard Brinkmann (Stuttgart 1978) 572–83.

### III. Friedrich Schlegel's Dual Evaluation of Euripides

In his Vienna lecture on the *History of Ancient and Modern Literature* (1812) Friedrich Schlegel insisted that the chorus was inseparable from the structure of ancient tragedy in its lyrical thrust and nature—a feature that modern poets had come to recognize through their imitative efforts to assimilate the genre. Perfect harmony and an appropriate relationship between chorus and dramatic action were therefore the most essential requirements for such tragedy. While in Sophocles both elements were in complete harmony, Schlegel continued, the chorus in Euripides appeared “as if it occupied its position only because of old right and habit, and otherwise rambled about through the entire realm of mythology” (*KA* VI 58). Earlier in these lectures, Schlegel had defined the notions of “clarity of reason in the arts and sciences” and a “striving for harmony in the order of life and the cultivation of the mind” as the most predominant features of Greek life during the second, most brilliant period of its intellectual and aesthetic history (VI 35f). And in an 1820 revision of an earlier essay, he argued that the ancients deemed Euripides an “immoral” poet precisely because of his violation of this basic demand for harmony, their “highest law of sublime beauty”—just as Plato had branded the new and licentious music of that period a sign of decay. (Schlegel hastened to add that in the practical sense, of course, Euripides was no immoral poet, but that in fact his work “overflowed” with as many moral sentences as the ancients produced [I 27f].)

This transgression of the basic requirements of harmony is a recurrent theme in Friedrich Schlegel's evaluation of Euripides, and is by no means limited to the relationship between action and chorus. In one of his earliest sketches on aesthetics (1795) Schlegel claims that “many-sidedness and facile grace in the arrangement and alternation of the means of poetry—language, meter, style” must serve an expressive necessity; otherwise, they testify to a “decayed art.” Euripides he considers conspicuous for this type of seductive yet false appeal (XVI 7). In a letter to his brother written toward the end of 1795, Friedrich Schlegel observes that Euripides' “rhythmic beauty,” so praised by the ancients, was actually inferior to that of Sophocles, and had only gained pre-eminence because Euripides strove for it “in isolation” at the expense of the “whole, which from now on was destroyed, and whose harmony was forever ruined.”<sup>29</sup> Regarding

<sup>29</sup> *KA* XXIV, no. 133.

their creation of characters, Schlegel believed that Sophocles bestowed upon them as much beauty as the requirements of the whole and the conditions of art permitted, while Euripides allowed to his own as much "passion (*Leidenschaft*) as possible, whether noble or ignoble, without regard for the whole and the requirements of art" (I 62).

This theme of passion is as central to Schlegel's arguments against Euripides as that of harmony. "In his ideal, his genius, and his art, everything is present in the greatest abundance," he had said in 1794 (I 61); "only harmony and conformity are lacking. With vigor and ease he knows how to touch and excite us, how to penetrate to the very marrow, and how to attract through an abundance of alternations. Passion, its rise and fall, especially in its impetuous eruptions, he depicts in an unrivalled fashion." As in the case of Medea or Phaedra, "Even high-mindedness and greatness are not of an enduring nature for him, as for Sophocles, but are violent manifestations of a passion, a sudden enthusiasm." Not infrequently Euripides spoils the nobility expressed in even these impulsive outbursts because, "just as in his artistic ideals, so in his personal genius there is a lack of harmony and restraint. He does not know how to curb and control himself as an artist, and is often carried away during the execution of an individual part, a favorite theme, so much so that he completely loses sight of the whole."

One characteristic feature of Euripides' subjective and individualistic manner is strikingly obvious in his attitude as a misogynist. "Euripides is a woman-hater," Schlegel declared, "and takes occasion, whenever he can, to declaim in the harshest manner against the female sex" (I 63f). Schlegel had expressed an emancipationist point of view in some of his early essays on Greek literature,<sup>30</sup> and cannot have found Euripides' attitude congenial. But while he saw in Euripides' "foolish and silly hatred of women" the "animosity of the offended party" rather than the "arrogance of an unjust oppressor" (I 115), he seems more concerned with its artistic implications than its social impact. He found it amazing and unique in the history of a literature in which nothing was merely accidental and personal, that Euripides allowed prominence to so individual an attitude. "The reason for this fault lies in the character and the ideal of this poet," Schlegel claimed, "because his general anarchy quite naturally made him more lenient toward his personal peculiarities" (I 64).

<sup>30</sup> Especially the essays "On the Female Characters in Greek Poets" of 1794 (*KA* I 45-69) and "On Diotima" of 1795 (I 70-115); cf. *KA* I cxlvii-clii.

Schlegel interpreted these qualities as characteristic of Euripides' era itself: a period of transition, a descent from the Sophoclean heights of Greek poetry to an unheard-of "aesthetic luxury" (I 60). Although their works vary in genre, modes of expression, moral and philosophical level, and the like, the main representatives of this period—Plato and Xenophon, Aristophanes and Euripides—were perceived by Schlegel as possessing many common traits. He considered it unfair that the Athenians should both sense their own decline and, at the same time, blame and even detest poets who, like Euripides, represented and expressed it (I 323).

But above all, Schlegel saw the particular nature of the new style in Euripides' tragedy not as an expression of weakness and decadence, but of fullness and abundance. There are passages, he would argue, that exhaust all aesthetic patience, but even these are part of the particular beauty Euripides has created: "He has never elevated himself to beauty of character, but in passion he is unsurpassed" (I 63). In describing this new style—as represented in the panegyric speeches of Lysias, in the works of Aristophanes, Euripides, and Isocrates—as one of "luxuriant exuberance," Schlegel reminded his readers that a work of art could be "empty" and still "luxuriant" (I 160). "There are many faults among the Greek poets, before which the modern ones can feel safe," Schlegel said, illustrating his point by referring to the richness of Aristophanes: "The man in whom Aristophanes' impetuous sacrilege inspires only anger, betrays not only the limitations of his reason, but also a shortcoming in his moral nature. For this poet's lawless excesses are not only seductively attractive because of their luxurious abundance of the most sumptuous life, but also capitivatingly beautiful and sublime through a profusion of sparkling wit, exuberant spirit, and moral power" (I 323).

Contrary to his brother's assertion, Friedrich Schlegel did not first present this image of Euripides in his essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry* of 1795–97, but in several earlier articles on Greek literature.<sup>31</sup> In fact the essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry* culminates in a section praising Sophocles' tragedy as the unsurpassed climax of its genre (I 296–301) and mentions Euripides only once, in a relatively positive manner (I 323). Schlegel's earliest published article, "On the Schools of Greek Poetry" (1794), presents Euripides as a decisive stage in a fourfold cyclical development of Greek poetry from (1) "harsh greatness" (Aeschylus), (2) "highest beauty" (Sophocles), (3) "vigorous,

<sup>31</sup> The essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry* was written in 1795 but did not appear until 1797. Cf. I clxi–clxxiv.

yet anarchical debauchery" (Euripides), to (4) "exhaustion" (I 14f). Schlegel's most vivid and sympathetic characterization of Euripides is to be found in the essay "On Female Characters in the Greek Poets," which appeared in 1794 in the *Leipziger Monatsschrift für Damen* and emphasizes the "passionate" features of Euripides' characters. Schlegel felt that Euripides excelled when the subject forced him to combine passion with beauty, as in Iphigenia, or when he had to present a beautiful scene in order to touch the audience all the more profoundly, as in Agamemnon's sacrifice of his beloved daughter (I 62). Yet "beauty of character" counts among the exceptions in this poet; "his proper terrain was passion, whose depths he knew fully," and there is "no richer or more moving picture of female pain than in the *Troades*" (I 63). In his *Dialogue on Poetry* (1800), Schlegel mainly reiterated his earlier ranking of the three Greek tragedians, but altered an important point in his image of Euripides by reducing "vigor" and "abundance" to "weakness" (II 293). In his Paris lectures on European literature (1803) Schlegel saw Euripides' chief merit in "single lyrical-musical passages," and found in this "snatching and aiming at single beauties" an analogy to the modern opera, for the spectator as well as the creative artist (XI 81f).

As we have seen, Schlegel applied the opinion that tragedy represents the conflict between man and fate, freedom and necessity, to tragedy both ancient and modern, Sophoclean and Shakespearean—although he would have hesitated to include the French tragedy of admiration in this general category. Ancient tragedy at its apex represented for him "harmony," the modern a "colossal dissonance." While ancient tragedy was "poetic throughout," modern tragedy displays an admixture of philosophical, rational, and reflective elements (I 246–49). Viewed in this light, Euripides' excellences lie not only in his terrifying depiction of human passions, in his seductive play of manifoldness, in his suddenness, his grasping for isolated beauties, and his "aesthetic luxury," but above all in a "modernity" comprising all these features as essential ingredients.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, some fragments in Schlegel's notebooks support this modernistic interpretation of Euripides: a note of 1797 observes that "Euripides is to be considered as an attempt at a synthesis of poetry and philosophy" (XVI 314). In another, of 1803, he assigns Sophocles to "pure drama" and Euripides to the "musical play," that is, to the "romantic" drama (XVI 516).

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this aspect see the section, "Klassische Schönheit und literarische Modernität," in my introduction to the separate edition of Friedrich Schlegel, *Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie* (Paderborn 1982) 89–103.

The synthesis of poetry and philosophy was one of the most fundamental postulates of Schlegel's romantic literary theory (e.g. II 161); and the "mingled drama," contrasting with the "pure drama" of the ancients, was a cornerstone in the genre theory of the Schlegel brothers. On the other hand, Friedrich Schlegel's attempt to become the "Winckelmann of Greek poetry" by describing its origin, differentiation, and decay, was part of his larger endeavor to pursue the course of modern literature and to formulate a literary theory worthy of all these accomplishments. The question of the beginnings of modernity thus pointed to an amazingly early date. Schlegel, like Schiller<sup>33</sup> and, later, Nietzsche, saw the beginnings of this new age in the rise of a new rationality manifesting itself in poetry with the tragedy of Euripides and in philosophy with Socrates (I 636). Nietzsche wanted to reverse the course of literary history and restore the tragic consciousness of the ancients. Although he saw great losses marking the transition from the ancient to the modern world, Schlegel took his stand on the side of the moderns. His own ambivalence towards the 'quarrel between the ancients and the moderns', however, is clearly reflected in his dual image of Euripides.

#### IV. A. W. Schlegel's Conception of Euripides

In his basic view of ancient tragedy, August Wilhelm Schlegel followed his brother's opinions in declaring that Aeschylus represented "the great and austere," Sophocles the "harmoniously perfect," and Euripides the "luxuriant yet disintegrated" tragic style (*SK* II 334). In his detailed treatment of Greek tragedy, however, August Wilhelm placed greater emphasis on such particulars as meter, poetic diction, and theatrical practicalities than his brother had done. But above all, from the beginning of his involvement in this issue, he made it one of public debate, first in Germany, especially in the literary circles of Berlin and Weimar; then, following the publication of his *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* (1808), in France; and finally, in the wake of the success of his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1808), among literary circles across Europe—among classical scholars in particular.

August Wilhelm simplified his brother's complex and ambiguous image of Euripides to an almost entirely negative one. He actually

<sup>33</sup> *Schillers Werke* XX (Weimar 1962) 432: "Diese Veränderung der Empfindungsweise ist zum Beispiel schon äusserst auffallend im Euripides, wenn man diesen mit seinen Vorgängern, besonders dem Aeschylus vergleicht."

maintained that to acquaint oneself with the “genuinely great style” of ancient tragedy, one could limit oneself to Aeschylus and Sophocles and simply ignore Euripides (*SK* II 351), as Schlegel himself had done in *The Art of the Greeks*, an elegy of 1799 dedicated to Goethe.<sup>34</sup> Again, he included in the 1802 volume of the *Poetic Annual* he edited with Tieck an epigram entitled “The Tragedians” (*SW* II 35):

Aeschylus conjures up Titans and calls down Gods;  
Sophocles graciously leads the row of heroines and heroes;  
Euripides finally, as a sophistic rhetorician, gossips  
at the market-place.

Reaction came in Karl August Böttiger’s *Prolusio de Medea Euripidis*, where, referring to a pathetic speech by Medea, he stated that Euripides’ insolent censors with all their efforts would not be able to produce anything comparable. Schlegel retorted to Böttiger that this had not been the issue in his epigram, and continued with a sarcastic lesson on the task of a critic (*SK* II 360). In this debate the discussion of Euripides in romantic Germany after the turn of the century assumed a style typical of the elder Schlegel.

In October 1801 Schlegel completed his drama *Jon*. The work was staged by Goethe in the Weimar Court Theater on 2 January 1802, and by Iffland in the Berlin Theater in May of the same year. Although it was not published until May 1803, the play aroused a lively debate throughout 1802, one of the main issues being its relationship to Euripides’ *Ion*. It had by no means been Schlegel’s intention simply to adapt Euripides to the modern stage. As with Goethe’s *Iphigenia*, he wanted instead to create his own tragedy on the basis of an ancient drama. He insisted on the originality and individual poetic unity of his work, arising from one central, dominating idea, in spite of similarities in plot and action to the Euripidean *Ion* (*SW* IX 201). Böttiger had written a biting critique of Schlegel’s *Jon* for the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden*, but Goethe intervened to prevent its appearance.<sup>35</sup> On 19 January 1802 the poet Christoph Martin Wieland wrote to Böttiger, “I, for my part, keep silence about all this nuisance and am translating Euripides’ *Ion* for the *Attisches Museum*, and for this very year.”<sup>36</sup> He

<sup>34</sup> A. W. Schlegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Böcking (Leipzig 1845 [hereafter *SW*]) II 11, lines 171–80.

<sup>35</sup> Theodor Distel, “Wielands Tadel an Böttiger,” *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 33 (1912) 216–18; cf. Uwe Petersen, *Goethe und Euripides. Untersuchungen zur Euripides-Rezeption in der Goethezeit* (Heidelberg 1974) esp. 106–16 (Schlegel’s *Jon*) and 151–60 (Goethe and A. W. Schlegel).

<sup>36</sup> Albert R. Schmitt, “Wielands Urteil über die Brüder Schlegel. Mit ungedruckten Briefen des Dichters an Karl August Böttiger,” *JournEngGermanPhilol* 65 (1966) 637–61.

obviously wanted to enable readers to compare the two authors' treatment of the same subject matter. When, during the summer of 1802, similar articles appeared,<sup>37</sup> August Wilhelm published an essay "On the German *Jon*," in which he explained that he had "developed the historical aspect of the fable to the point of a more general interest," and created a "heroic family portrait" (*SW IX* 207).

Since there had been so much talk about the relationship of his work to that of Euripides, Schlegel did not miss the opportunity of pointing out to his readers that Euripides' tragedy was unsatisfactory in the "poetic and moral (these two coincide here), as well as the historical realm" (*SW IX* 205). For him, Euripides' *Jon* was based on the "violation of moral relationships between persons because of the sanctioning of a continuing lie on the part of the adopted son towards his father, and the wife towards the husband, who thereby and without any guilt is, so to speak, expelled from the union of a confiding love" (*SW IX* 203f). He also emphasized the weak rôle of the chorus, Mercury's awkward exposition at the beginning, and the lame appearance of Minerva towards the end, characterizing the entire work as containing, like most of Euripides' plays, "beautiful parts" but "on the whole . . . loosely and miserably composed" (*SW IX* 206). His intention had been "to do better than Euripides" (*SW IX* 200), and if his *Jon* had accomplished its goal, then it would itself provide a critique of the Euripidean *Jon* (*SK II* 377). Aristophanes had given us all that could be said about the "deep corruption and inner wretchedness of that poet," Schlegel thought, but had been misunderstood because his comedies had been taken as "mere farces and pasquilian mischief" (*SW IX* 203).<sup>38</sup>

The opportunity for a comprehensive evaluation of Euripides did not arise until 1801, when Schlegel inaugurated his lectures on aesthetics in Berlin. The second cycle of these lectures, presented in the winter of 1802–03 under the title "History of Classical Literature," contained a comprehensive section on Greek tragedy. Although these lectures were widely attended by the public, and parts of them were circulated in manuscript form,<sup>39</sup> they remained unpublished until the edition of 1884, when they had already become an historical docu-

<sup>37</sup> See Rudolf Haym, *Die romantische Schule. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin 1906) 705–09.

<sup>38</sup> It is in this specific context that August Wilhelm mentions his brother as the first modern critic to recognize the deep decay in Euripides in comparison with his two predecessors.

<sup>39</sup> Schlegel, for example, sent copies of his lecture notes to Schelling, who was lecturing at the time on aesthetics at the University of Jena: cf. E. Behler, "Schellings Aesthetik in der Überlieferung von Henry Crabb Robinson," *PhJ* 83 (1976) 137–39.

ment.<sup>40</sup> But Schlegel fully integrated the section on the Greek tragedians into his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* delivered in Vienna in 1808, which subsequently appeared in four editions (1809, 1816, 1845, 1846),<sup>41</sup> were translated into almost every European language, and appeared in the United States in the Black translation.<sup>42</sup> In this particular work, as Goethe observed, the doctrine of German romanticism traveled around the world.<sup>43</sup> To fully understand Schlegel's image of Euripides, one should begin with its initial formulation in the Berlin lectures of 1802–03.

After a positive characterization of Aeschylus and Sophocles, in which Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* appears as the *ne plus ultra* of Greek tragedy, Schlegel declared that Euripides had "not only destroyed the exterior order of tragedy, but also missed its entire meaning" (*SK* II 352). Anticipating Nietzsche's definition of literary *décadence* as an insurrection of the parts against the whole,<sup>44</sup> Schlegel saw in Euripides "the magnificent formation of tragedy hurrying towards its dissolution. . . . If works of art are to be considered as organized wholes, then this insurrection of the individual parts against the whole is precisely that which in the organic world is decomposition. It is all the more hideous and disgusting, the nobler the structure that is now being destroyed by it, and, in the case of this most excellent of all poetic genres, must inspire the greatest repugnance. Yet most human beings are not as susceptible to this spiritual decomposition as to the physical one" (358).

In the first place, Euripides abandoned the idea of fate. To be sure, fate appears frequently in his works in a superficial, merely conventional manner, but does not create a sense of a genuine conflict between human freedom and fateful necessity (352). Euripides' chorus no longer has any structural interrelationship with the action but has become instead an inessential, episodic ornament (322f, 358). The great freedom in the treatment of myth that was one of the privileges of tragic art has in Euripides become "capricious arbitrariness" (356); and because he overthrew everything familiar and

<sup>40</sup> See the edition cited *supra* n.1.

<sup>41</sup> Cited from the fourth edition (identical with the third) in *SW* V–VI.

<sup>42</sup> A. W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, tr. John Black (London 1815). A second edition appeared in 1840, and a "Revised Edition According to the Last German Edition" was published by A. J. W. Morrison (London 1846) and became part of Bohn's Standard Library. Black's translation was reprinted in Philadelphia in 1833.

<sup>43</sup> *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler, XXIV (Zürich 1947–53) 405f.

<sup>44</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* 7.

habitual, he was compelled to introduce prologues reporting the circumstances and foretelling the development to come. These prologues make the beginnings of Euripidean tragedies “very monotonous” and aesthetically awkward (356). The trochaic tetrameter, used by Sophocles whenever he wanted to express a “sudden passionate motion,” appears in Euripides much more frequently (333); this “luxuriant versification” transformed “ancient severity into irregularity” (358).

Another basic alteration Schlegel saw in Euripides was that he no longer believed in the gods in the simple manner of the people, and as an artist took every opportunity to introduce allegorical interpretations that revealed how ambiguous his piety actually was (354). He had passed through the school of the philosophers—not through the Socratic one, as many believed, but through that of Anaxagoras—and he enjoyed the friendship of Socrates. This philosophical background manifests itself in the “vanity” of Euripides’ constant allusions to philosophical and moral pronouncements (353). These occasionally exhibit dubious morality, as in Hippolytus’ apology for perjury (*Hipp.* 612) or Eteocles’ defense of injustice committed in the pursuit of power (*Phoen.* 524f), frequently quoted by Caesar as a pragmatic basis for getting things done in government (354f). Indeed, immoral ideas not infrequently gain the upper hand in Euripides’ plays, and lies and other mischief are occasionally excused because of underlying noble motivations (354). Moreover, like his brother, August Wilhelm observed that Euripides was a woman-hater, and considered his many references to the inferiority and unreliability of the female sex to be a further aesthetic failure.

August Wilhelm shared his brother’s view that passion and passionate exchange were the main characteristics of Euripidean tragedy, but gave to it a much less favorable interpretation than Friedrich had done. He felt that many critics had misunderstood Aristotle’s reason for calling Euripides the most tragic of all ancient poets (*Poet.* 1453a10): Aristotle was in fact simply referring to Euripides’ mastery of the art of exciting the passions. If the purpose of tragedy was indeed to purge the passions through the arousal of terror and pity, some pieces of Euripides certainly offer this potential. But we should also remember Plato’s complaint that the mimetic poets exposed their audience to the power of the passions and made them emotionally self-indulgent by constant use of exaggerated and melting lamentations (*Resp.* 10.604<sub>D</sub>–605<sub>A</sub>). Schlegel was convinced, as we noted earlier, that Euripides, the most popular tragedian of the time, was the immediate target of Plato’s attack (351ff). “With luxuriant

softness he lavished 'material' attractions which captivate only the exterior sense"; Euripides never missed an opportunity to allow his characters to indulge in animated but useless fervor; his old people forever lament the inconveniences of age; and by exposing his characters' weaknesses and debilities, expressed in naïve, involuntary declarations, he appealed to the low and common in human nature. In using the term "material," Schlegel adopted an expression used by Winckelmann with the meaning 'sensual' and 'low'. Euripides, for the first time, had made love—the wild passion of a Medea or the unnatural desire of a Phaedra—the main subject of his dramas (355). Whenever he had an opportunity Euripides pursued whatever was touching, and for that reason not only sacrificed decency but also abandoned coherence and harmony, so that some of his dramas seem to have been tossed together by the wind (357).

Schlegel's characterization of Euripides does not, however, conclude on this entirely negative note. His very unevenness has some virtue: Euripides is especially good in depicting sick, lost, and passionate souls, and is truly excellent with subjects requiring emotion along with moral beauty, as with, for example, *Alcestis* and *Iphigenia*. Only a few of his dramas are wholly without truly beautiful parts (359). Yet it is clear that A. W. Schlegel did not see the excellences of Euripides as his brother did, from the point of view of a modern, progressive philosophy of history, but from a conservative perspective in which literature is judged according to pre-existent models.

## V. The *Comparaison* of Racine and Euripides

Schlegel's Berlin lectures on tragedy included a comparison of Aeschylus' *Choephoroe*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Euripides' *Electra* (*SK* II 360–70) that was later incorporated as a separate chapter into his Vienna lectures on *Dramatic Art and Literature* (*SW* V 147–62). The purpose of this section was to "bring into the clearest light," by way of a "parallel among three plays on the same subject," the relationship of Euripides to his "great predecessors" (*SK* II 360). The result is predictably unfavorable to Euripides. Aeschylus approached the "terrifying aspect" of his subject and transposed it into the "realm of the dark gods." Sophocles lent it a "marvelous organization," and concentrated the main interest on Electra, thus giving the entire subject a new twist. In spite of the horrible deed, we sense a "heavenly serenity" and the "fresh air of life and youth" in Sophocles' version. Euripides, however, presents us with a "rare example of poetic senselessness." Why, for instance, does Orestes tease his sister

so long without making himself known to her? In his treatment, the event is no longer a tragedy, but merely a “family portrait in the modern sense of the word” (*SK* II 370).

The ‘parallel’, as a literary genre, was favored by the Schlegel brothers because it permitted them to point out excellences or faults in concrete fashion. This form of critical approach owes much to the *Bioi paralleloi* of Plutarch, and had become popular in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* (with Perrault, for example), because it could be used to defend the modern position. The most famous, even notorious, such ‘parallel’ by the Schlegels is surely August Wilhelm’s comparison of the Phaedras of Racine and Euripides, published in French in 1807.<sup>45</sup> As he wrote to the Countess Luise von Voss on 20 June 1807, he had just finished “something anti-French on Racine’s *Phaedra*,” which was being printed in Paris and would certainly bring down upon himself all the *beaux esprits* of that city.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, by devaluating through this ‘parallel’ one of the *chefs-d’oeuvre* of the French classicist theater, Schlegel soon became the target of the leading newspapers in France;<sup>47</sup> one critic called him the “Domitian of French literature, who desired to knock it down with one single stroke” (*SW* VII xxvi). But Goethe greatly appreciated the *Comparison*,<sup>48</sup> and Madame de Staël was also an admirer.<sup>49</sup>

Without going into every detail of a rich book, one that secured for Schlegel pre-eminence in European literary criticism, we can say briefly that he pursued his comparison in three main steps: he first showed that, contrary to the assumptions of the classicist theory, Greek and French tragedy are diametrically opposed (*SW* XIV 336). Schlegel then proceeded to prove in a detailed analysis that in order to be able to write a tragedy according to the prerequisites of French *goût*, Racine had to make a considerable shift in the focus of the drama so as to minimize tragic necessity and fatality; he had, furthermore, to strip from the main characters that “ideal beauty” which constitutes the charm of the masterpieces of classical antiquity and seems to introduce us to a race of nobler mortals who are almost divine (378). Finally, Schlegel inquired into the nature and goal of

<sup>45</sup> *Comparaison entre la Phèdre de Racine et celle d'Euripide* (Paris 1807 [= *SW* XIV 333–405]).

<sup>46</sup> *Briefe von und an August Wilhelm Schlegel*, ed. Josef Körner, II (Vienna 1930) 200.

<sup>47</sup> In, for example, the *Journal de l'Empire* of 16 and 24 February and 4 March 1808, as well as in the *Mercure de France*. See Josef Körner, *Die Botschaft des deutschen Romantik an Europa* (Augsburg 1929) 12.

<sup>48</sup> See his letters to Eichstädt of 23 September and 18 November 1807, and to Frau von Stein on 19 November 1807.

<sup>49</sup> Körner (*supra* n.47) 12.

tragedy in general, and the difference between ancient and modern tragedy; on this basis he arrives at the goal of the entire undertaking, a conclusive depreciation of Racine in favor of Euripides.

Arguing from the viewpoint of the poetic and aesthetic principles of German romanticism, Schlegel asserted—not without some arrogance—that knowledge of Greek tragedy had progressed since the days of the classicist critics (*SW* XIV 335; *cf. supra* section II) and could no longer be based on Aristotle, who had shown little understanding of it. Schlegel, with some irony, admits that Racine was certainly the most able representative of the French theater, uniting in the cultivation of his mind the most salient and refined traits of the age of Louis XIV, whereas Euripides, despite his capacity for “ravishing beauty,” was most uneven in his art and already manifested the “degeneration” of Greek tragedy (337f). Moreover, Schlegel did not question the “inimitable beauties of poetic and harmonious diction” in Racine (334)—indeed, he repeatedly mentioned his liking for them. But in fact a quite negative evaluation of Racine’s poetic language emerges from Schlegel’s comparison of Racine’s “pompous, overcharged, and exaggerated declamations” with the “exact, circumstantiated, and thereby picturesque narration in a noble but simple style that is supposed to be the natural language of tragic characters.” In Euripides “there is nothing too much. Everything seems to indicate how this inevitable misfortune has occurred” (370f).

The assumption of the French classicists that their theater (and their tragedy especially) rested on the same principles as that of the Greeks, and that it reflected a continuation—although at an infinitely higher level of perfection—of ancient drama, Schlegel dismissed as mere illusion (*SW* XIV 335). In a later section he attempted a definition that ironically summarized the main prerequisites of tragedy according to the classicist theory: “serious representation, in dialogue form and elevated style of one action, completed, and capable of inspiring terror and pity” (385f). We have seen that the Schlegels no longer judged tragedy according to the rules of a ‘poetics’, but from a philosophical perspective that allowed them to inquire into the innermost metaphysical principle underlying the tragic fiction. This principle was for them “fatality” in Greek tragedy, and “providence” in modern tragedy (388). Since modern authors perceive the moral relationships and destinies of man in a fashion opposite to those of the ancients, Schlegel argued, it is not astonishing that in imitating classical tragedy they attached themselves “more to the form than to the base on which this superb edifice rests.” Most frequently, however, when they crafted their fiction, they simply “arranged it in the

common frame of five acts, and while observing the unity of time, space, and the other theatrical conventions, they believed they had fulfilled their task without troubling themselves with any ulterior goal” (392). Another feature sharply distinguishing ancient from modern tragedy was for Schlegel the preponderance of love as the dominant passion on the modern stage. Aeschylus and Sophocles excluded love almost entirely from their drama because it was tragedy’s task to allow the dignity of human nature to appear, while love was considered a passion man shared with animals (339). Schlegel was of course aware of the refinement of the concept of love during the course of Western literature, and was himself a pioneer in the discovery of the Provençal literature of the Middle Ages.<sup>50</sup> Yet he insisted that, in order to elevate the particular drama of Euripides to its tragic heights, the poet needed an “irresistible fatality”—in this case, the incestuous love of Phaedra for her stepson Hippolytus, with its catastrophic result. It was therefore imperative for the dignity and effect of tragedy to keep the horror of incest ever-present in the imagination of the spectator: “in this regard, moral and aesthetic needs coincided” (339f).

This shift of focus in Racine’s tragedy, and his consequent neglect of the element of necessity, manifests itself for Schlegel first in the title and the rôle accorded to the main characters. Euripides focussed his whole composition on the virtue of the young hero, while Phaedra was merely the instrument of the action: thus the title, *Hippolytus*. Racine, on the contrary, presented Hippolytus as “effaced and pale,” and lent his heroine considerable graces and seductive qualities in spite of her “monstrous aberration.” Although his drama was entitled *Phaedra and Hippolytus* in the first production, the second name was later dropped, with good reason (*SW* XIV 340f). Euripides’ Phaedra possesses the greatest simplicity, and is a completely consistent character, mourning the evils of human life and revealing strains of lyrical beauty when she abandons herself to the wanderings of her imagination (341f). Racine’s Phèdre, in spite of her rhetorical *élan*, appears to Schlegel “arid and meagre”; but the major fault of the French version lies in Racine’s attempt to avoid as much as possible the idea that Phaedra’s passion is an incestuous one (344). “The frenzy of passion,” he says, “resembles the exaltation of virtue, in that it cancels out calculations of personal interest and makes one defy all dangers and sacrifice all advantages. One therefore forgives a human misled by a passion that causes misfortune to others”

<sup>50</sup> See his *Observations sur la langue et la littérature provençales*, *SW* XIV 149–250.

(347). Towards the end of her tragedy, the French Phèdre shows fear, whereas the Greek Phaedra has nothing to lose: "She draws Hippolytus along into the abyss into which she has first thrown herself" (355).

Schlegel is especially startled by Racine's alleged inability to recognize Hippolytus' true character. The French author's muse was "la galanterie," and he therefore invested all his poetic energy in depicting an "affectionate woman," leaving Hippolytus rather "insignificant," in effect highlighting one character at the expense of another (*SW* XIV 358f). The Hippolytus of Euripides possesses the "austere purity of a virginal soul," comparable to a figure like the Belvedere Apollo. Only such a figure, with his "imperturbable calm" and devotion to the goddess Diana, could provide an appropriate contrast to the aberrations of Phaedra's voluptuous passion (364f). Similarly, according to Schlegel, Racine mis-rendered the character of Theseus by presenting the first lawgiver of Athens as a philandering vagabond, whereas in Euripides the venerable hero maintains his dignity as husband and father even in the most extreme moments (371-78). "In poetry as well as in the sculpture of the ancients, there reigns, even in the most violent situations, a certain moderation derived from magnanimity. These energetic souls, a great expert in antiquity once said, resembled the sea, the bottom of which always remains calm, although the surface is agitated by tempests" (366).

In short, Schlegel wanted to demonstrate through this comparison the complete disparity of ancient tragedy and French *tragédie classique*, with its demands of verisimilitude and "poetic justice" based on the standards of the seventeenth century during the age of Louis XIV. He considered the restriction of the action to one single day an actual violence of probability: "I am therefore asking whether it is not offensive to all verisimilitude if one represents to us human actions of the highest importance punished and recompensed, in such a short space of time?" (*SW* XIV 380). If one inquires into the basis for our satisfaction and our sympathy with the violent and painful actions represented in tragedy, he argued, one discovers that it is "the feeling of the dignity of human nature awakened in us by grand models, or the trace of a supernatural order imprinted and somehow mysteriously revealed in the apparently irregular course of events, or the reunion of these two causes" (384). Seneca had said that a great man fighting against adversity was a spectacle worthy of gods (385). If one questions further the rôle of destiny and adversity in the fiction of the tragic poets, one must conclude that in Greek tragedy it has a

deeply religious cause, in “fatality”—not in the sense of arbitrary decisions by the gods, but that fatality which reigns even over the gods (387).

At the time of the appearance of his *Comparaison*, Schlegel had entered a religious phase in his thinking; he had become acutely aware that such fatality stood in flagrant opposition to Christian belief in a Providence that seemed to cancel the possibility of genuine tragedy (*SW* XIV 388). But his sense of the impenetrability of Providence had exposed a new basis for tragedy in the apparently checkered order of things in this world. His recent discovery of Calderón as the foremost Christian tragedian had prompted his translations of selections from this Christian style of tragedy, in his 1803 volumes *On the Spanish Theatre*;<sup>51</sup> and he discussed its character in an essay of the same year.<sup>52</sup> A third tragic system appeared to be represented by Shakespeare, most remarkably in his *Hamlet*. Schlegel called this “philosophical tragedy,” or the tragedy of speculation, of “perpetual, unending reflection on the purpose of human existence—a reflection whose Gordian knot is finally cut by death” (*SW* XIV 393f).

Although Greek tragedy was for Schlegel based on an irreconcilable and unyielding conflict between “moral liberty” and “fatal necessity,” he saw the idea of a reconciling Providence foreshadowed in at least some of the ancient works. To be sure, terror dominates in the tragedy of Aeschylus; his *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroe*, and *Eumenides* constitute a single chain of vengeance. Yet this sequence of revenge comes to an end under the influence of divine wisdom, represented by Minerva (*SW* XIV 389f). The rigorous power of fatality is even more remarkable in Sophocles, whose Oedipus is cast from the height of a glorious life into disgrace and frightful desperation; but at the end of his life, embraced by the tenderness of his daughters, he finds a haven of peace. The tomb of a man from whom one would have turned away during his life becomes a blessing to the land that preserves it (391). Euripides, from this religious point of view, offers a double face. On the one hand, he respects the religion that protects him; but on the other, he exhibits the philosophical pretensions of a sophist. He gives preference to tenderness and sensibility, searches for brilliant effects, and sacrifices the unity of the whole for the sake of the fascinating parts. And yet, Schlegel admits, “beyond all these

<sup>51</sup> *Spanisches Theater*<sup>2</sup> I–II, ed. Eduard Böcking (Leipzig 1845). See E. Behler, “The Reception of Calderón Among the German Romantics,” *Studies in Romanticism* 20 (1981) 437–60.

<sup>52</sup> A. W. Schlegel, “Über das spanische Theater,” *Europa*, ed. Friedrich Schlegel (Frankfurt 1803) I 72–87.

faults, he is gifted with an admirable facility and an eminently amiable and seductive genius" (391).

In addition to this remarkable appreciation of Euripides' poetic qualities, Schlegel even came to recognize the "religious" and metaphysical aspect of *Hippolytus*. For here no human foresight can avert the fatality of the drama. Phaedra is the victim of a fatal hatred on the part of Venus, and Hippolytus dies as the result of her eternal rivalry with Diana, the object of Hippolytus' devotion (*SW* XIV 395f). The scene in which Diana approaches the dying Hippolytus represents the highest manifestation of human dignity in the reconciliation between father and son, a scene that "alleviates hard fatality as much as was possible." Here Diana reveals to Hippolytus and to Theseus the true cause of the misfortune that has destroyed Phaedra and Hippolytus, as well as Theseus. Of the dialogue of these three characters Schlegel says, "I know of nothing at all, either in ancient or in modern tragedy, that is more touching" (402f). To pay tribute to the poetic genius of Euripides and to give his French readers some flavor of its beauty, he translated the entire scene into French (398–402).

## VI. The Repercussions of A. W. Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*

It should be clear that Schlegel's image of Euripides was by no means as one-sidedly negative as is often claimed, but showed a remarkable understanding of his poetic qualities. But unlike his brother, who had also perceived Euripides' departure from the classical standard while viewing him in the perspective of a progressive conception of literary history, August Wilhelm had the habit, as Heine put it, of "always whipping the back of a younger poet with the laurel-branch of the older one."<sup>53</sup> He was not able to integrate the two aspects of Euripides into one unified image; his evaluation remained ambivalent and unreconciled. When he integrated the predominantly negative sections on Euripides from his earlier Berlin lectures into his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, however, he realized that they would appear to conflict with the favorable judgments of the *Comparison*: he felt that he could not "arbitrarily change measure and weight" (*SW* V 132). Schlegel tried to solve the problem by stating that, viewed independently "without consideration

<sup>53</sup> Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Oskar Walzel, VII (Leipzig 1910–15) 12.

of his predecessors," Euripides deserved the highest praise, but serious blame when seen in the context of poetic development: "Of few authors can one truthfully say so much good and bad." Similarly his *oeuvre* offered Schlegel this double aspect: "sometimes he has enchantingly beautiful passages; in other places he sinks into real vulgarity" (131f). With this brief qualification, Schlegel proceeded once more to demonstrate how Euripides brought about the collapse of Greek tragedy. He did not go beyond the essence of his Berlin lectures but simply rounded out his presentation, raising it to that level of style for which the *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* have become famous.

It was in the four editions of this work and its many translations that Schlegel's image of Euripides "traveled around the world," exerting considerable influence on classical scholarship in Germany and beyond.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly Schlegel's image of Euripides had a decisive influence on the philosophy of tragedy in the German idealism that forms the intellectual background for Nietzsche's first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Schelling's lectures on the *Philosophy of Art* (1803–04) follow Schlegel's Berlin lectures in their discussion of tragedy,<sup>55</sup> presenting Euripides as "separated" from his two predecessors because of the "material" motivations in his arousal of our sympathies, his manipulation of myth, and his introduction of prologues. He is great in depicting passion, not in presenting beauty (353–55). Schelling's discussion is little more than a condensed and superficial version of Schlegel's ideas, which are themselves a summary of what Friedrich Schlegel had written. In Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* it is again Euripides who first attempted to make his appeal through "subjective compassion," and departed from the "rounded plasticity" of the earlier characters in Greek tragedy.<sup>56</sup> In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel sees in this trend the first symptoms of the "principle of decay" (XI 339).

Even Friedrich Schlegel, when he delivered the lecture courses of his own later period, came quite close to his brother's views on Euripides. In his lectures on the *History of Ancient and Modern Literature* (1812) he maintained his high opinion of Aristophanes, for whom, as for the tragic poets, he had been a pioneer champion in European literary criticism. Yet he now felt that the "abundance of ingenious

<sup>54</sup> See *KA* I lxxivf.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted from F. W. J. Schelling, *Werke* V: *Philosophie der Kunst* (Stuttgart 1859). On Schelling's dependence on Schlegel see *supra* n.39.

<sup>56</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner, XIV (Stuttgart 1965) 553, 569.

invention and comic wit" in the work of Aristophanes was closer to the "grand style of the serious poets" than to the "rhetorical softness and sentimental poverty" of a Euripides (*KA* VI 42), and he noted with pleasure that when Aristophanes, as a comic poet, lashed out against the tragic poets, he relentlessly attacked Euripides but treated Sophocles with "noticeable consideration, even with a deeply-felt respect" (43). In his lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, delivered in 1828 shortly before his death, Friedrich spoke with emotion about the high rank of the "ideal of beauty, in character and noble disposition" that marked the golden age of Greek poetry, with which his own studies in the humanities began: "No nation has been able to attain the charm and grace of Homer, the sublimity of Aeschylus, and the beautiful nobility of Sophocles. Yet perhaps it is wrong even to strive for this, because the truly beautiful and grand can never be attained by way of imitation. Euripides, however, who fully belongs to a period dominated by rhetoric, will only be included with his predecessors by those who are incapable of comprehending and appreciating the grand spirit in all its majesty" (*KA* IX 187).

Nietzsche was probably ignorant of the opinions of these philosophers when he first took up the theme of Euripides and Greek tragedy and gave it a new impulse. But in time, August Wilhelm Schlegel's work became known to Nietzsche not only through his teacher Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl, Schlegel's colleague at Bonn, but also through his own studies when he began preparations for *The Birth of Tragedy*.

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